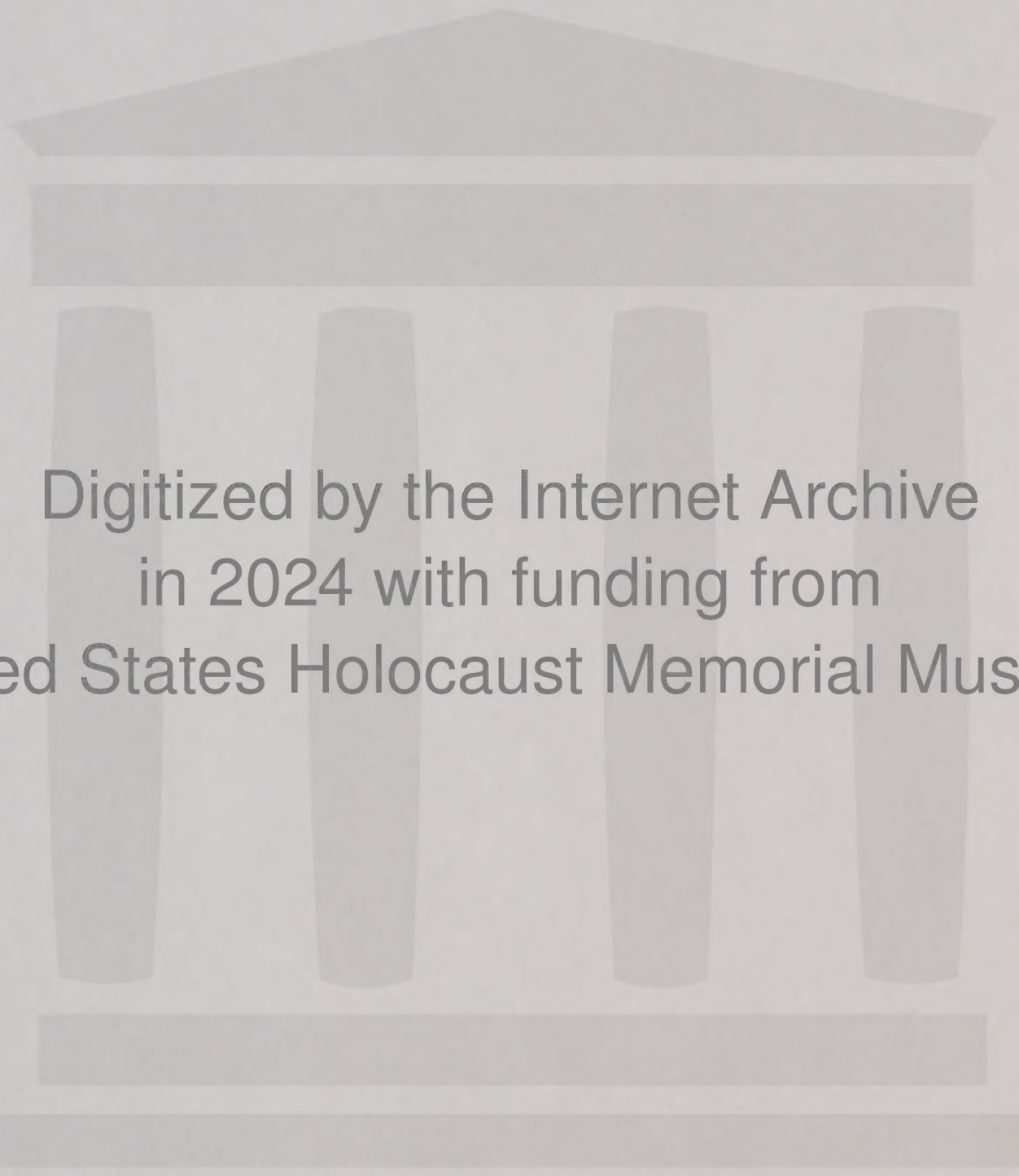




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The following is an account of my traumatic experiences during the "HOLOCAUST".

We had some information about the Nazis from people - Jews, coming in droves from the West, where they were persecuted, arrested, or in many cases killed, but the atrocities of the Nazis grew the further East they went.

In Lwów, especially in my family's house, we were all German-speaking believers in German culture and civilization and no one could accept the accounts of their atrocities.

We could have gone East - towards USSR, but the older people had their roots in Lwów, the younger ones were trying to find work essential to German industry or in factories related to the war.

It started in September 1939 in the West of Europe, the Germans invaded Poland shortly after.

In the first 2 - 3 days after they came to Lwów the Germans were rounding up Jews to bury the dead left over in prisons after the retreat of the Russians. We were living in a Christian district, not far from the police and the Leona Sapiehy prison. The Germans caught thousands of men and women, they drove them along our street beating them with their rifles. One could hear the people crying out in pain. In the evening of the first day the women were allowed to return to their homes, all the men were taken to a temporary concentration camp. They were given nothing to eat, they were told to sit on the ground with their heads between their knees every movement was punished. They sat motionless for 2 - 3 days and nights, some fainted and some never got up. On the 3rd day they were counted and every tenth was taken away. all that time they

were without food. In the meantime the SS-men were joking and telling some of the Jews to go home, but as soon as the poor creatures were up they made their dogs chase them. The dogs were trained not to kill but to jump up to a man's throat and to hold on. The poor victims were brought back by the dogs, the soldiers were roaring with laughter, they were having a great time.

One of the victims was my friend's husband. He was told to go home after 3 days, I happened to open the door for him, he was black from hunger, he collapsed, could not say a word. After a rest of two days he told us the story.

This way we got a taste of things to come.

We became all busy studying our faces, our hair, our Polish pronunciation, we were asking vital questions: was my nose Jewish, was my skin clear, was my Polish correct, could I be taken for a Gentile? Women, lucky owners of straight noses, those who could be mistaken for Gentiles, were holding their heads high, they were special. It was impossible for men to hide their identity no matter how Christian they looked.

At that time we were commanded to wear the David's star - a yellow patch on our arms. A Jew caught without it was killed on the spot. My husband was tall, blond, with blue eyes, we both spoke an impeccable Polish, we also knew German very well. But blond hair or blue eyes did not help him much. He got a job as a guard in a "Übernachtungsheim" (hostel) of the "Organisation Todt". There was no pay, of course, but some food, and what was more important he received a work-pass for himself and one for me, as I was his "Hausfrau" so, for the moment we were safe.

Zosia, my little girl was not allowed to play in the park, luckily she did not understand yet what was going on.

My father was looking for a job, my mother was weak, suffering from a heart condition, my sisters were in a factory producing military uniforms.

It was like a temporary lull, but it lasted not long.

After a while the Germans started to requisition homes, rob and plunder. As I was still living in a Christian area, comparatively unmolested, all the liturgical objects from my grandfather's synagogue were hidden in my house.

My grandfather, a rich banker before the war, had his own synagogue for relatives and friends. He had a most magnificent silver crown for the Torah, heavy silver plaques with Hebrew inscriptions, a heavy pointer "yad" also lots of other silver and gold religious ornaments.

One day a group of SS-men and soldiers of the Wehrmacht came to my apartment, they took everything what was left after the Russian occupants. One of them grabbed the crown and the heavy "yad", he asked what all that was for, but my throat was tight, I could not and would not answer. He hit me, I did not care, my heart was aching.

My brother Emanuel -- Manek was caught in the street and taken to an SS camp. After a while he was given a pass and could come home for the night. One day he told us he saw 2 SS-men beating two Jews then cracking their skulls against each other, he saw their brains splashed on the wall.

They were guilty of stealing a bar of soap.

We took in two families who were forced to leave their apartments, our apartment was big, we were occupying a whole floor. There was one large room with a separate entrance, we gave it to a girl who was Volksdeutsch. She was to be our protector until the time came when we were to move to the ghetto. All she did was to change her room into a brothel, the traffic was non-stop, she said it was the least she could do for the Fuehrer.

I found on my neck a louse, at first I did not know what it was, but I remembered having seen this insect in my zoology book. Food was very short, if not for my husband we would have all died. My father who was very religious would not touch "unkosher" food, he was shrinking before our eyes.

The day came when we could not hold on to our home anymore, we had to move into the ghetto. We had only a few belongings, who wanted more?

We got one room which we had to share with a stranger. Our windows were facing Janowska street. The weather was hot, we had to keep our windows open. One night I woke up, I heard a peculiar sound coming from the street below. I looked from the window and saw in the twilight masses of people. They had to be in time at their work, they were given no transportation and had to start walking at the crack of dawn to cover the distance. There were thousands of them, dragging their tired feet, shuffling, shuffling, one two, one two. Some were supporting others who were near collapse, they did not want them to die. German soldiers on both sides of that column of ghostlike people, were prodding them with rifles. I heard them shouting: lauf, lauf.... Men fallen on the sidewalks were left where they collapsed.

The shuffling of feet changed after a few weeks into the sound of trucks carrying deportees. They were standing tightly packed, one by one, staring at the sky, searching for God, hoping for a miracle. Once I heard somebody crying out aloud 'Shmah Israel Adonai Eloheinou'.. I stopped watching from the window, I could not take it anymore. The Germans started a systematic, carefully planned clearing of Jews district after district.

One day I went to see my mother, I arrived just when the Nazis were rounding up all the Jews in that area. I went to the window hiding behind the curtain. In the street were groups of Jews with their faces towards the wall, being pushed and kicked. Each of them ^{had} a little bundle. These were deportees. The SS-men stopped a block away from my parents' house. We knew the SS-men would come again, so, we took my parents and hid them in the Uebernachtungsheim where my husband was working. It cost a diamond ring.

After a few days the "Aktion" was finished and my parents returned home.

The topic of conversation among us Jews now was : how and where from to get personal documents to prove one was a non-Jew. I had no idea how to go about it.

My Christian landlady, the wife of a university professor, taken as a hostage by the Russians, tried to convince me to run away from Lwów. One day she brought me ⁶/catechism/ and the new testament. She insisted I disappear with Zosia and suggested a watering place - a spa, where the people were used to strangers, to people coming and going. She assured me I would not have to change my ways, I would have to go to church occasionally, watch other churchgoers and do what they were doing. It was the last time I saw her, she made the

sign of the cross on my forehead and said she hoped that with time I would become a real Christian. She was a wonderful person and would have done a lot for us, but her children were against it. If you helped a Jew you were punished by death.

Every now and then the Jewish Council was told to collect from Jews heavy contributions in money, jewelery, furs, warm cloths. All that was being used for the soldiers on the front, they were not prepared for the Russian winter. Things were somehow getting worse for the Germans. The Jewish Council was responsible to the Germans for collecting contributions, heavy fines, for preparing lists with numbers of people who were ~~being~~ told they were being resettled but who in reality were driven to the gaschambers.

My grandmother's brother who was the head of the Jewish Council in Gorlice, was requested to prepare a list of Jews to be resettled, he asked for time he needed for preparing the list, when the Germans came the next day they found him dead at his desk, He took his own life.

My husband started looking around, trying to buy documents for Zosia and myself, he wanted us two to go away he would join us hopefully at a later time. In the meantime he got for us part of a room in the ghetto, we had to share it with another family. Our life did not belong to us anymore. "Round-ups" were now happening daily, whole blocks were being cleared, the SSmen were getting closer to us, soon it would be our turn. We were like animals, with only one sense left, an instinct of self-preservation.

My husband wasn't anymore secure at work, some days he was hiding on the roof lying flat, pressed to the drainpipes.

I found for Zosia and myself a hiding place, it was a platform un-

der the roof of an adjacent house. In order to get there I had to jump from the window of our topfloor across to the window of the next building. First I used to throw my daughter across the ventilating shaft, somebody was catching her on ^{the} other side, then it was my turn. I carried usually a bag with food and a change of cloths for my child. A new "Aktion" was taking place in August, the days were stifling hot, the nights on the platform under the roof, freezing, we were about 15 people in a little hollow space, crowded like sardines. One of the people, a girl of about 13 had epilepsy. Whenever we heard the heavy German boots in the empty apartments below, she used to howl like a dog, her mother used to smother her cries with a pillow. After a few days I could not hide any longer, I decided to face my destiny come what may.

Again it got quieter for a little while.

My husband succeeded in getting papers for my two sisters, they were authentic birthcertificates bought from Christians. There was a whole industry blooming among the Poles and Ukrainians, they were getting rich selling papers to Jews.

My husband bought a real birthcertificate for Zosia and a marriage certificate for myself. The papers were supposed to be delivered in a day or two by a man who sold the documents at the same time to somebody else. I decided to get them, I had to save my child, no matter how. On the second day the other "client" came to tell me he would not leave my house before he got the papers for his wife and child. The Pole who sold them to both of us was supposed to have them in my room on that evening. I started praying, asking for a miracle, I felt if I got the documents somebody else was going to die. That "paperman" hadn't shown up, it was getting late, the curfew

hour was starting, the second buyer had to leave. Jews were shot when caught in the street during curfew hours, so the chance was mine and God helped me without me having to become a monster.

The "paperman" came late, very drunk, he pointed to the papers in his pocket but first he wanted more wodka. Fortunately I had a bottle of wodka in the room, he drank it and fell down completely unconscious. I pulled the papers from his pocket, they were mine, I paid for them. Again an "Aktion" started.

My husband came home once or twice, I was mostly alone with my child. I went to see my parents, but then again hell broke loose.

The Germans came three times to get me to the gaschambers, but every time I pleaded with ^{them} in German and they left. It was much harder the fourth time, they insisted I come with them, then they changed their mind and asked for the child only, they said the Fuehrer loved children, he would take good care of her. I knew what was in store for little children, there was a mountain of little bodies in the camp at Janowska street their blood was used for transfusions for soldiers on the front. At last they left. I was regaining my senses, when I heard a soldier coming in again. He told me not to worry, to lie low, not to go near a window, the "Aktion" was finished, tomorrow I could go out and look for food. I was shaking all over, he must have been a messenger from heaven.

How am I not to believe in miracles, the fact we are alive is a miracle.

In that last "Aktion" my parents were deported, they died in Belzec, my grandfather died a natural death, my grandmother was shot, I also lost the family on my husband's side.

There were whole empty streets now, they were only crowded with ghosts of people who lived here only a short time ago.

It really was like the end of the world, you were asking God, if there was one, how could he accept it and not help.

I became like a stone, suffering was not penetrating my heart anymore. My husband came home and insisted that I leave with Zosia right away. In the last "Aktion" tens of thousands of Jews were deported from Lwów, the area of the ghetto was shrinking, there were fewer Jews alive now.

We had to move again, so, on 9/1/42 my husband went to the Jewish Council in the ghetto, to see our friend DR.Katz to ask him for a place to live. On that day somebody killed a drunken German soldier and the Jews were made responsible for his death. The Germans surrounded the building of the Jewish Council, put machine guns at the entrances, then made all the Jews leave the building, they mowed them down one by one. My husband jumped from a window but he was shot, Dr.Katz jumped from another window, he managed to run across the street and hide in a cobbler's workshop. The whole Jewish Council was hanged. We heard what was going on in the ghetto. I left my child at my sister's and started on my way to look for my husband. My first steps were to the Jewish Community House, I found the whole Jewish Council hanging from first floor balconies. After many years I found out from Dr.Katz's widow how my husband had died.

In the evening of 9/2/42 I had a meeting with my brother and two sisters and we decided to run away. My child and I were supposed to leave first, my sisters a few days later, the last one was to be Manek, but he never made it, he left it too late. He was caught at the railway station in Lwów and hanged. I was told about it by Julek, a Pole who escorted Manek to the station. I could never rid myself

of the suspicion that Julek gave him away.

Our new life.

On September 6th 1942 I left Lwów with Zosia. I was carrying only a small case, the rest of the luggage was sent on by rail to Kraków. I was afraid to go into the New World on our own, I, therefore asked Julek to escort us there, of course I had to pay him for the "job". He mailed our luggage and kept the receipt, he was to pick it up after our arrival in Kraków, he was also to help me to find a room. We arrived at night in pouring rain, knocking on many doors only to be told there was nothing for us. Late at night we found a bed for Zosia and me. The journey from Lwów to Kraków was ^anightmare, Julek pretended not to know us on the train, I realized I could not count on him. I saw him the next day in the morning and then he disappeared with luggage receipt and all. I never saw him afterwards, but I found out later that he was also the escort of my poor brother who tried to escape but was caught.

I could have taken revenge on Julek later on when the Russians liberated that part of Poland, I could have told them his name, but it would not have brought my brother back to life and ^I_V did not care about the luggage.

Kraków was chokeful with Germans, it was the capital of the "General-Gouvernement" and ^{unless} _Vone had an essential job one could not stay there. In order to look for a job I had to leave Zosia with an old woman who made her pick up cigarette stubs in the streets, sometimes she could stay in an orphanage, where the nuns let her have a plate of soup. Zosia used to wear a card with name and address round her neck, I as-

ked whoever found her to bring her to our "home".

In one month I changed my address 5 times, I wanted to shake off all traces of our existence, I was afraid of Julek.

I found a job in a German bank, the pay was very low, I had no experience except the knowledge of the German language.

I established contact with my two sisters, but there was no sign of my brother, who by that time was already dead.

Our last accomodation, or rather bed in Kraków was with a Polish family. One of the sons was a former Polish officer, the second son I found out escaped from a prison. The officer suspected I was not a Christian and made my life hell. Going home after work I was never sure I will see my child alive. One night the Gestapo knocked at our door, they were looking for the son who escaped from prison. The Gestapo had us all lined up for interrogation, all the time hitting us, asking questions, pointing their guns at us. When it was my turn I answered in German, they were so surprised they put their guns away. The family especially the Polish officer were watching me with fear, I knew where their son and brother was hiding, of course. I said nothing. The next morning I found a glass of milk at our bed, it was the first glass of milk my daughter had in a long time. After that night the family's attitude towards us changed completely, but I felt because of that brother, the escaped prisoner, our stay there was not safe, in fact it was dangerous.

On my way from work I had to walk outside the Jewish ghetto wall but there was a space through which you could see the ghetto inmates. I could never pass by without fear, though sometimes I envied them, my life was so miserable, if not for my child I would have gone in there to be done with.

One day I found all the houses alongside the wirefence on fire.

Jews were jumping from windows , soldiers shooting at them....I saw one soldier holding two small children by their legs, smashing their heads against the wall. I stood there numb with fear, I felt suddenly I had to throw up.

I put an ad in a paper looking for a job outside Kraków with board and lodging, if possible, I stressed I knew German. I imagined outside the city it should be easier to find a room, more food. I was starving all the time, lice were eating us up, I had boils on my fingers and body, my child was constantly sick. I notified my sisters about my plans. One of them stayed in Kraków as a maid in a German home, the second was a domestic with a Polish family. I got an answer to my ad one day, a German SSman in charge of a Polish cooperative was looking partly for a housekeeper partly an interpreter with office duties. The location was Busko-Zdrój, a little town of 10,000 people, actually a spa. He offered a little room and as to food - I would get it in the Coop's canteen, he also offered a small salary. He was going for a vacation to Germany at a certain date, his chauffeur, provided I agreed, would pick both of us up and bring us to Busko. I accepted his conditions and he set the date . I gave notice in the bank,gave up the room,but there was no word from the German. I became frantic, I went to the office of the airline and was told the flight was delayed, at the same time they gave me the date and the hour of his next flight. On the day of his departure I was sitting at the airline agency waiting for him. They paged him and when he saw me he started screaming and cursing those "wretched Poles" and so on. I was not moved, I had no choice, besides, what could happen to me but death and that would have been a relief. I threatened I would go to the Gestapo and show them his letters and tell them about my giving up the job and lodging. He got frightened and inst-

ructed the chauffeur to take us to Busko.

The little room in Busko was an extension of a granary it was damp and dark we were already in the month of October, the weather very cold.

How was a little girl to survive a winter there?

After the return of the SSman (Leming) from Germany he offered me a room in his apartment. I could have spat in his face, he realized immediately I wasn't cut out to be "ein Maedchen fuer Alles", so, all there was, was the office job and interpreting. After a few days I found an empty little room with kitchen, it belonged previously to a deported Jewish family. I thought at last we will be able to breathe.

In front of our doorstep was a stone very slippery in winter, I slipped many a time and nearly broke a leg. I was imagining the old tenants were resenting the fact that I was alive and they dead.

The sidewalks in Busko were paved with Jewish gravestones with Hebrew inscriptions, I used to avoid stepping on them. Little girls of poor Polish families wore dresses made of Jewish prayer shawls.

Now and then the Germans were still catching remnants of Jews whom they were shooting. First they made their victims dig their graves then they were shot.

One day I was walking with Zosia when we met 2 SSmen with dogs, they were taking a young woman and a little boy to be shot. They found them in the woods, the two poor creatures had dead leaves in their hair, their clothes were in tatters, both were barefoot. The little boy was clinging to the woman, she had her arm round his shoulders. I felt getting pale but I had to look at the woman. I see her still today, her face is haunting me in my dreams. The SSmen had a triumphant expression on their faces, they were performing their duties with Zeal, they were doing it for their Vaterland.

I started working in the office, but there was new trouble in store.

The Polish resistance was beginning to be very active, trains were sabotaged, food supplies destined for the Eastern front were being diverted en route. Many young Poles were caught. Young fighters who sabotaged supplies sent out by our Cooperative were brought to the office of SS Leming, my boss, they were interrogated. I had to interpret from Polish to German and vice versa. Both parties were swearing, screaming, I was very frightened. Many of the young Poles were shot.

News about my knowledge of German soon spread in the little town, I had to fear two enemies now, the Germans for being Jewish and the Poles who suspected me of spying. The Poles were following me everywhere, one false step, one mistake and we two would have paid with our lives. Neighbors started asking my daughter questions about who I was, where we came from, where was her daddy. The poor child was all confused, I told her her daddy was taken to Russia when the Russians retreated, and that he would return one day. I started drilling her without mercy. I was losing my mind. I never knew what to expect coming home from work. My child started hating me, running away whenever she saw me coming. I realized one day I was on the way to become insane, I was driving both of us to a lunatic asylum.

On that day I changed completely, I tried to regain the confidence of my child, gradually she started trusting me again.

There were whispers among the Poles that the Jews in the Warsaw ghetto organized a rebellion and what's more, they were inflicting losses on German tanks and soldiers. The Poles in Busko (mostly peasants) were surprised at the Jewish heroism, their hatred and contempt towards Jews changed grudgingly to admiration. All those whispers were filling me with hope and pride. I started to realize there was also a change in the attitude of Poles towards me, they became all of a sudden friendly, helpful, they even let us have some food. It took a long time to find

the reason for that change. One day at lunchtime my little daughter came to my office asking me to be taken to the outhouse (toilet). As usual someone followed us without me knowing it. That someone was listening to our conversation and decided I could be trusted. To this day I do not know what we were talking about.

I received a letter from my sister from Gelsenkirchen near Mainz in Germany, she was in a labor camp. She had to leave her job at that time in a pharmacie in Bochnia, because of her boss. He tried to intimidate her, he threatened he would tell the Germans she was Jewish he wanted her to sleep with him. She hated him and decided to go to Germany where, she hoped, it would be easier for her to survive. All she asked from me was for food parcels, they were getting almost nothing to eat. The camp was daily bombarded by the Allies, she was not hiding in a shelter, she had had enough and wanted to die. The food parcels we sent never reached her, they were stolen before delivery. After the war I found out that the camp was razed to the ground by the Allies' bombs. When the Allies were asked to bomb the tracts leading to Auschwitz or other extermination camps, they never did it, but instead they bombed labor camps with poor, innocent laborers.

It is amazing how much a human being can suffer, one is made of steel, you spring back and carry on.

My life was getting more settled, I started to be more interested in what was going on around me. There was only one thought which kept bothering me - no news from my sister in Germany.

At that time I was teaching, secretly of course, high school children Latin and German. The Poles were not meant to pursue a higher education, the students therefore, used to slip into my house, one by one and also leave separately. It was dangerous but gratifying.

This was also the time when I stopped sleeping at night, my fears, my pain, my thoughts were going around in my head, I had nobody to share them with.

One day an itinerant priest came to Busko, he was preaching in a field, outside the church, without any fear of the Germans. He gave a sermon to give us courage and hope to overcome all the suffering. After the sermon I felt I could trust him. I asked if he could hear my confession. He called me into a church and entered the confessional. He was sitting inside, not looking at me, I whispered my confession that I was Jewish. He kept quiet a while then said not to fear anybody and anything only God and I will be helped, He will have mercy on me. I left relieved, full of hope.

Before the war I was a non-believer, I stopped practicing Jewish tradition, I believed only in ethical principles. and here I found myself believing in God, in a higher power, I felt the presence of a supernatural being, protecting my child and me. That feeling and the love of nature saved me and from it I was drawing hope and strength for survival.

Zosia was almost a normal child by now, she even started having fun with friends. Life was getting less tense and dangerous and when my sister from Kraków came to live with us it was almost normal. She started teaching mathematics and took care of Zosia.

The war was turning bad for the Germans, each such news was lifting my spirit. The Germans were retreating, they were fighting close to our little town, they were running west.

The war ended with the Russians entering our town. I saw thousands of German soldiers throwing their arms away, their shoes were torn, their clothes in tatters. I thought living was worthwhile to see all that happen.

I am human and revenge is a sweet feeling.

My only surviving sister from Kraków came to stay with us.

After the war, Jews - survivors of the holocaust, former citizens of Busko started coming back. They found their businesses taken over by Poles, their houses occupied. The Poles did not like the idea of getting out of the houses and businesses and, to whom were they to give it all up - to Jews who dared to be alive?

In 1946 or 1947 there was a pogrom of the Jews in Busko, 60 or maybe 80 were killed. The victims had to go through the whole war, the persecution, to be killed in Busko, or Kielce, or Radom?

A delegation went to the bishop in Radom asking for a condemning proclamation, but the bishop refused to do it.

In 1946 I got in touch with my aunt in London and my uncle in New York, they helped us to leave Poland.

We were the remnants of a family which had consisted of a father, a mother, brother, sister, in-laws, husband, now there were only three of us left: my younger sister, my daughter and me.

When we arrived in London I told Zosia I was Jewish, she suffered a nervous breakdown, she hated the Jews, she was the product of a Polish school, where there were only peasants, the greatest antisemites.

I am not sure I did the right thing digging in my past, there are still nights when I wake up screaming. I cannot forget the sound of German boots, it still makes me shudder.

This account should be called the

"story of a miracle".

